

John Francis Clark

1816 – 1898



It is a sad fact that many people, well respected in their professions, have passed away with no record of their lives – working or domestic. All their papers have been destroyed and, except for a few lines in the press or the odd book, they have left no mark.

One such is John Francis Clark and this very imperfect work is intended to be some sort of memorial to him.

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For he was a judge - and a good judge too...  
John Francis Clark 1816 - 1898

Although during his career he was 'credited' with few wrong decisions<sup>1</sup> as a racing judge no-one ever impugned the honesty of Mr J F Clark. This honesty was helped by the fact that, duties apart, he took no interest in racing or racing people at all.<sup>2</sup> At his Newmarket house visitors, excepting family, were not encouraged. Local politics were of no attraction for him either.

His main occupation, racing in the Victorian era being but a tiny fraction of today's calendar, was that of architect.<sup>3</sup> In this he may have been following in the footsteps of a brother, John Medland Clark<sup>4</sup> who sadly died at the early age of 36. His most noteworthy, and lasting design, the Custom House at Ipswich,<sup>5</sup> is much admired to this day.

Although J F Clark was later to claim he was born at Newmarket he came into this world on 8 February 1816 at Norwich<sup>6</sup> where his father was a builder. John Francis followed father's footsteps in business and later qualified as an architect. He first came to note in 1856 when he was employed in the design of a new workhouse, the New Union Workhouse at Kedington near Haverhill.<sup>7</sup> He was later to be an expert in the design of ecclesiastical buildings,<sup>8</sup> and of more interest to some of us, race course grandstands.

The Clark connection with racing was an old one. J F's grandfather,<sup>9</sup> also John, was appointed by the Jockey Club as starter in 1806<sup>10</sup> in succession to John Hilton. Hilton was the first to hold such a post.<sup>11</sup> In 1822 J F's father [John again] took the position which he held till John Francis's accession in 1850,<sup>12</sup> though they had

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1 See appendix 1: The Trials of a Judge & appendix II To err is...

2 *Glasgow Herald* 17 Oct 1898. Whilst normally one would have a sceptic attitude to obituaries, this was written by a highly knowledgeable and long serving, though sadly for the present, anonymous, writer. He had been writing since the 'Hastings era' of the early 1860's and his contributions have always been found to be accurate.

3 His first office was at the Corn Exchange, Bridge Street, Norwich where he is still noted in the *Post Office Directory* in 1869; in the same Directory he is shown as having a 'Private Residence' in Snailwell Road, Newmarket. He did, however, have an office in Newmarket as he received tenders there. See *Building News* 26 Sep 1862.

4 John Medland Clark was born in 1813. . He came to be highly respected architect. He died, aged 36, on 11 April 1849 [BMD Jun 1849 Ipswich 12 p268]. In March 1850 a number of his clients and friends erected a substantial memorial to him in St Matthew's Churchyard, Ipswich. - *Ipswich Journal* 9 Mar 1850

5 Built 1844-1845. red brick and white stone. A conference centre is now housed in the once bonded warehouse which was on the ground floor.

6 *Pall Mall Gazette* 17 Oct 1898, *Glasgow Herald*, and death noted *Freeman's Journal*, same date.

7 *Ipswich Journal* 9 Feb 1856.

8 Many sources, including *Times* obit 17 Oct 1898.

9 'Originally a bricklayer' - *Newcastle Courant* 22 July 1853.

10 *Sporting Days and Sporting Stories*, John Fairfax Blakeborough.

11 He served since 1770.

12 Various dates are given for the start of John Francis' professional career between 1850 and 1853. It is almost certain that it was 1850. In 1850 John Clark was 71 and may have been unwell. See below. However in a short obituary of his father the *Newcastle Courant* [22 July 1853] says J F began on his own in 1852 as does *Baily's Magazine* June 1876.

worked together since 1843.<sup>13</sup> On Tuesday 11 July 1850 at Southampton John Francis judged that Mr Galpine's<sup>14</sup> Strap won the first heat in a maiden race by a neck,<sup>15</sup> for his first 'official' decision. Four heats were run before Mr Hewett's Evening Star in the attractive rose, black cap colours, was declared the winner.

At first it was thought by some that Clark would not be a successful judge as he was shy and retiring.<sup>16</sup> The writer 'Craven' thought he lacked nerve for the job. He was, however, cool and unexcitable two of the main qualities required. The next 30 years were to prove his quality.

It had been Clark's father<sup>17</sup> who had much increased the family's judging activities. By 1842<sup>18</sup> he was employed at Newmarket, Epsom, Ascot, Goodwood, Doncaster, Liverpool, Egham, Brighton, Bath, County of Gloucester, Chelmsford, Southampton and a number of minor meetings. In that year he travelled 2,700 miles<sup>19</sup> and judged 394 races, including 84 heats. On Saturday 29 October he judged twelve races.<sup>20</sup>

J F Clark held the position as judge till 1888 when he retired after announcing the winner of the last race at Warwick on 21 November. Lord Penrhyn's Noble Chieftan [black and white stripes, scarlet sleeves and cap] had won a mile maiden plate by an easy four lengths.<sup>21</sup> It is more than likely that also in the box was Mr Charles Edward Robinson<sup>22</sup> who was to take over as judge in 1889. The position was not moving out of the family; Robinson was Clark's son-in-law. Robinson did not hold his judge's post for long; he died of gastric fever on 11 November 1893.<sup>23</sup>

It has been noted that fees paid by the Jockey Club during the last half of the 19th century were generous.<sup>24</sup> Those for judges were no exception, but soon J F Clark was adding to his income by becoming Clerk of the Scales,<sup>25</sup> which, as he had to

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13 Baily's Magazine of June 1865 puts the date as 1837 - again at Southampton.

14 Mr Galpine's colours were not recorded. This was in the days before the Jockey Club realised that they could make a large, and regular, income from a compulsory register of colours.

15 *Racing Calendar*.

16 Baily's Magazine June 1876.

17 He died aged 74 on Friday 15 July 1853 [BMD Sep 1853 Newmarket 3b p277]. He was taken ill on Oaks day at Epsom [27 May] and never recovered. He had married Matilda possibly at Oakley, Suffolk on Christmas Day 1808. She died 18 Jan 1848, aged 64. [BMD Mar 1848 Newmarket 14 p88]. A monument in their memory stands outside St Mary's Church, Newmarket. It may have been designed by John Francis.

18 *Sporting Magazine* December 1842.

19 It should be remembered that this was before the rail network was fully in place. Therefore he travelled many miles on horseback and stage coach.

20 Ten matches; an eight runner handicap, and to finish an eight runner 5 sov sweepstake. - *Racing Calendar*.

21 *Racing Calendar*..

22 Robinson was most probably born at Asgarby, Lincolnshire in summer 1850 [BMD Spilsbury Sep 1850 no ref. The page with his details in the register shows 'Horncastle 19 p 451'].].

23 His death is not apparent in BMD. However *The Times* published an obit on Monday 13 Nov 1893. No other newspaper reference can be found.

24 *Glasgow Herald* 24 Oct 1898.

25 It is not known when he first took up the duty of weighing. There are many references in the press [especially *The Era*] and sundry Calendars.

see, and learn, the colours of the riders was no hardship at all. He added further to his income by being Clerk of the Course for Great Yarmouth.<sup>26</sup> He also endorsed, at a fee, race glasses. 'Burrow's Landscape Glasses' were said by Clark to be '... all that is required for racing purposes... just the glass I wanted... and far superior to other...'.<sup>27</sup>

There was great sadness in Clark's home life. He had married Sophia Barnes at Malden in early 1847<sup>28</sup> and among her children were two daughters who had married well. Grace was born in 1850.<sup>29</sup> She married John Revett Clouting in summer 1874.<sup>30</sup> Clouting described himself variously a 'general practitioner (medical)'<sup>31</sup> or 'surgeon and apothecary'<sup>32</sup> and was surgeon to the 4th Norfolk Rifles<sup>33</sup> - his practice was at Thetford.<sup>34</sup> However he described himself he was bankrupt in early 1887<sup>35</sup> and by this time he seems to be separated from his wife and at least three children<sup>36</sup> who had survived infancy.<sup>37</sup> He died, aged 49, in 1894.<sup>38</sup>

The other daughter, Catherine Constance, was born in late 1853.<sup>39</sup> She married Charles Edward Robinson<sup>40</sup> at Newmarket in summer 1876.<sup>41</sup> She bore him two children who survived but she died, probably in childbirth,<sup>42</sup> in 1882<sup>43</sup> aged 28.

Clark's wife passed away, aged 72 in early 1872.<sup>44</sup> So he had seen the loss of at least a wife, two sons-in-law and a daughter while he continued to be in excellent health.

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26 *Ipswich Journal* 16 Aug 1873.

27 Many citations including *Handbook of Florence and Its Environs* 1861 and *A Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy* 1862.

28 BMD Mar 1847 12 p195.

29 Her birth appears not to be in BMD and no notice of birth has been seen in local papers. She does not appear in Suffolk births 1849 or 1850 either as *Clark* or *Clarke*. her birth date is fixed by Census returns.

30 BMD Sep 1874 Newmarket 3b p895.

31 1881 Census. He was, or claimed to be M R C S England, *Whites Directory* 1883.

32 On his becoming bankrupt. *London Gazette* 1 Mar 1887 p45.

33 *Ipswich Journal* 30 March 1878.

34 His address: Angel Inn, Market Place, Thetford..1881 Census. *White's Directory* 1883.

35 *London Gazette* 1 Mar 1887 p45.

36 While the fact that for the 1881 and 1891 Census they were at separate addresses, Grace in Newmarket and Charles Edward at Thetford [1881] or Steyning [1891], is not conclusive added weight is given by Charles Edward's death in Sussex.

37 They were: Anna Mary, BMD Jun 1875 Thetford 4b p385; :John, Mackenzie BMD Mar 1877 Thetford 4b p402 : Josephine Amy BMD Dec 1878 Thetford 4b p377.

38 BMD Jun 1894 Steyning 2b p169. Age 49.

39 BMD Dec 1853 Newmarket 3b p445.

40 Robinson was a farmer in a large way of business at Cranwell in Lincolnshire. At the 1881 Census he records a holding of 979 acres with 14 employees.

41 BMD Jun 1876 Newmarket 3b p895.

42 As noted above she was married in the Jun qtr 1876. In the 1881 Census she is shown with two children; Ernest E aged 2 years and Catherine E aged 5 months. This is a strong hint that she had had a baby, or babies, that had died in infancy or were born dead. Her death some twenty one months after the birth of Catherine suggests one, or two more confinements.

43 BMD Sep 1882 Newmarket 3b p296. Age 28.

44 .BMD Mar 1887 Newmarket 3b p895 Age 72

Clark's architecture business flourished. In 1862 he designed the new grandstand for Chelmsford<sup>45</sup> race course and was inviting tenders for its construction.<sup>46</sup> Southampton followed and in 1864 the new Winchester stand was opened.<sup>47</sup> It was in 1867 that his masterpiece, as far as race course buildings are concerned, was opened at beautiful Stockbridge; The Bibury Club<sup>48</sup> Stand. As this was for a private club no descriptions of the stand were written at the time. Photographs show it to be an elegant and highly functional building.<sup>49</sup> It is to the shame of all concerned that not a single race course building of his survives to this day. Even worse not a single original drawing or letter from his practice survives either.

Throughout his life Clark was careful with money<sup>50</sup> and invested in land 'when it was cheap'.<sup>51</sup> So from 1888 he lived a prosperous retirement at Fairstead House, in the parish of Exning, where he died on 16th October 1898, aged 82.<sup>52</sup> His affairs were wound up the following July by D'Albani and Ellis, Solicitors, Newmarket.<sup>53</sup>



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45 *Building News* 19 Sep 1862

46 The new stand was complete for the 1863 meeting on 23 and 24 June. A description of the stand from the *Era* [28 June] is at appendix III, together with a note from *Baily's Magazine* of July 1863.

47 *The Era* 24 Jul 1864

48 The Club was a very old one. Their annual meeting had a number of homes the most noteworthy of which, and at the time of the Club's most renown, was at Stockbridge racecourse from 1831 to 1898. Little is known about the Club as it was kept very private. Its members were from the highest in society and racing and very exclusive

49 The author would be happy to send a picture of the stand and course to anyone interested.

50 Never one to miss a business opportunity he was agent for the Suffolk Alliance Fire and Life Insurance Co. - *Post Office Directory* 1869.

51 *Glasgow Herald* 24 October 1898.

52 BMD Dec 1898 Newmarket 3b p338.

53 *London Gazette* 16 Jun 1899 p22.

## Appendix I - The Trials of a Judge.

At the time, of course, the Judge had no recourse to photographs or television replays. In addition he was faced with two very difficult problems. Firstly his box was situated at the finishing post *and at the same level as the course, and against the rails*. This made it difficult to see all the running. Horses finishing on the box's side had a distinct advantage as they appeared to be finishing faster than those in the middle or far side of the course.. The box had been introduced to give protection from jostling, and irate backers who did not like a result.<sup>54</sup>

The second problem was the width of courses. Newmarket, for instance, is today disfigured by rails cutting both courses in half [one of the reasons for the rails is due to the inability of today's riders to keep their horses straight - Gordon Richards rode on the full width and came straight from his draw down the course, thus not losing distance].

It is to be wondered why no-one thought of giving the judge an elevated position, if not for his added protection. The reason, most likely, was that the finishing post was, often, in front of the Club or Members' enclosure and a servant was not wanted amongst the nobility and gentlemen in the stand.



## Appendix II - To Err etc

The Cambridgeshire over the straight mile and a distance<sup>55</sup> at Newmarket was not a happy race for Clark and on a number of occasions his verdict was questioned, though in those far off days when racing was conducted in the main by gentlemen 'the judges verdict is final' was accepted by most. A mistake occurred in his last judging year when on Tuesday 23 October 1888 he called M. P Aumont's Tenébreuse [white, green cap, silver tassel] the winner when Mr W J Legh's Veracity [blue, straw facings and cap] had won. In fact Tenébreuse was not in the first eight. The error was pointed out to him and although Tenébreuse's number was in the frame it was taken down and the correction made.<sup>56</sup>



## Appendix III a. - Chelmsford Grandstand

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54 Many of the boxes had wheels. Highly necessary at places like Newmarket where there were more than one finishing posts. On the Heath there were at one time seven. Even modest Lewes had two.

55 A 'distance' is 240 yards - twenty yards longer than a furlong. Today, and for many years past it has been run over a mile and a furlong.

56 It is almost certain that the 4-y-o Tenébreuse with a 14lb penalty for wining the Cesarewich on 9 October and a weight of 8st 12lb was number 2. Veracity, also 4 years, had 7st 4lb on and was likely 13.

From The Era 28 June 1863  
CHELMSFORD RACES Tuesday, June 23 & Wednesday 24 June 1863

Judge: Mr J F Clark, Newmarket. Starter: Mr T Marshall. Clerk of the Course: Mr Joseph Barton, Chelmsford. Secretary: Mr W D Burrell, Chelmsford.

As far as the sport on Tuesday and Wednesday last at Chelmsford is concerned, the meeting was nothing like so good as those decided in former years, and the sport on both days was of the most miserable description, but a decided character has been given to the gathering by the formation of a new and commodious Stand, which, with the improvements in the course, will make it one of the best in the Home Circuit if an alteration can only be made in the programme.

The weather opened fine on Tuesday, and continued so all day, and those members of the Ring who mustered early examined the new building above mentioned with much interest. It occupies an area of 73 ft. by 40 ft. and it consequently takes up more than treble the space the old Stand did, while a spacious retiring room for ladies is attached to the balcony, and, in addition to a large refreshment room, a portion of the lower part of the Stand is set apart for a weighing room. The new building was erected by Mr Moss, the contractor, from designs by Mr Judge Clark, of Newmarket, who was warmly congratulated during the meeting on the ability he had shown, and it is placed nearly opposite the site of the old Stand, consequently the horses were viewed coming up the straight from the right instead of the left hand side of the course. The attendance in the Ring on Tuesday was very numerous, and it comprised many Turf notabilities....



### Appendix III b. - Chelmsford Grandstand

From Baily's Magazine 'Our Van July 1863 p 318

For Chelmsford the new stand will do wonders, and Mr Clarke [*sic* - *ECG*] is fairly entitled to every credit for the rapidity with which he completed it, and the skill he evinced in its design.



### Appendix IV - Building News and Architectural Review 21 March 1862

#### CHURCHES



SUFFOLK - For the work to be done in additions and alterations to Ousden Church, Suffolk. Drawings etc with Mr J F Clark, architect Newmarket. Tenders to Rev W S MacDonall, Rectory, Ousden, on or before 24 March.

CAMBRIDGE - For the works to be done in restoring the north wall and roof to nave of Kirtling Church, Cambs. Drawings etc at the offices of J F Clark, architect, Newmarket. tenders sealed and endorsed 'Tender for Church Restoration' to be sent to the Rev W Chavarse, Kirtling Village before 24th last.

